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July 18, 1962

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Memorandum of Conversation between the President and Ambassador Dobrynin, Tuesday, July 17, 1962, 6:00 p.m.  
(prepared from the President's account and approved by the President July 18)

The President met alone with Ambassador Dobrynin and talked with him for just under an hour. The atmosphere of the conversation was agreeable. After some pleasantries the conversation turned on three subjects: Berlin, nuclear testing, and developments in Southeast Asia.

On Berlin, the President told Dobrynin that he had prepared and would soon have delivered a reply to Chairman Khrushchev's recent communication. The President emphasized that the presence of Allied troops in West Berlin is a vital interest of the United States. For this reason none of the Soviet proposals for alternative arrangements could be accepted; all of them, in one way or another, implied the departure of Western troops -- they would get us out, and without so much as a fig leaf of concealment. This would mean a major retreat. Europe would lose confidence in U. S. leadership. It would be a major victory for the Soviet Union and a major defeat for the West.

Ambassador Dobrynin said that Chairman Khrushchev would be greatly disappointed in this response to his most recent proposal. He asked whether the American position was related to German interests or American interests. The President said again that he was speaking of a vital U. S. interest. There might well be other issues on which we would be willing to press the Germans quite hard -- as, for example, on the structure of an access authority. But on the question of our presence in Berlin, there was no argument among the Western Allies; it was of vital interest to all. The President remarked that he had made this point clear to Foreign Minister Gromyko in the fall of 1961.

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(Berlin--cont'd)

Ambassador Dobrynin argued that in its present condition Berlin is a potential source of dangerous friction and conflict and that a removal of Western troops would lessen the dangers. The President stated that while he could understand Soviet objections to the presence of Western troops, he must emphasize again that the removal of Western troops would be a disaster for us, while their presence was not a disaster for the Soviet Union.

The President also emphasized that Soviet-created tensions in Berlin had caused increases in Western rearmament and that any new crisis would have a similar effect. The President noted the disagreement which the United States has with its Allies on the diffusion of nuclear weapons, and said that Soviet-created tensions could only increase the danger of results which the Soviet Government would not like. Ambassador Dobrynin argued in reply that it was the fact of Western troops in West Berlin which created these dangers. This was the one point of direct confrontation between opposing great powers, and it was naturally a source of danger. If the confrontation could be ended, the dangers would be reduced. The President repeated that the real cause of danger was the Soviet effort to change the existing situation, that the way to reduce tension was to reach an understanding, and that the presence of Allied troops was a vital interest. The Ambassador repeated that the Chairman would be disappointed.

(comments on nuclear testing are on page 3,  
and on developments in Southeast Asia on page 4)

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Further section of memorandum of conversation between the President and Ambassador Dobrynin, Tuesday, July 17, 6:00 p. m.

Nuclear testing

On testing, the President stated his continuing hope for an agreement. Ambassador Dobrynin inquired about the meaning of the new evidence on which Ambassador Dean had commented in Geneva. The President said it was certain that in response to any renewed Soviet tests American scientists would urge the need for additional American testing, so that it would help if any new series of Soviet tests could be short. The President pointed out that the current American series was a response to Soviet tests, while Ambassador Dobrynin, for his part, argued that the Americans had had many more tests than the Russians.

(comments on Berlin are on pages 1 & 2,  
and on developments in Southeast Asia  
on page 4)

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Further section of memorandum of conversation between the President and Ambassador Dobrynin, Tuesday, July 17, 6:00 p.m.

Southeast Asia

On Southeast Asia, the President and Ambassador Dobrynin exchanged compliments on the satisfactory developments in Geneva on Laos. Ambassador Dobrynin inquired about U. S. troops in Thailand. The President replied that 1,000 Marines had been removed and that he expected to remove the remaining Marines after the Laos agreements had been signed. He did not consider that his earlier message to Chairman Khrushchev covered other troops. Ambassador Dobrynin remarked that there would still be an American army combat group in Thailand, but the President stated that his earlier assurances did not refer to that group.

(comments on Berlin are on pages 1 & 2,  
and on nuclear testing on page 3)

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In the meeting between Dobrynin and the President, Dobrynin told the President that the Soviet Union would resume nuclear testing. He did not give a date.

(this portion appears only on the President's copy  
and on Mr. Bundy's copy)